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ABSTRACT

Celestin Freinet had a major influence on education in France. In 1917 he was critically injured during World War I and convalesced for two years. During World War II he was incarcerated by the Vichy government for his Communist tendencies, and, in the 1950s the French Communist Party harassed him for straying from their hard-line ideologies. Celestin's educational and intellectual output was prodigious: he taught elementary school, founded his own Freinet School in 1935, organized conferences for more than 40 years, and wrote 18 books and nearly 3,000 articles in 17 journals that are a repository of his educational ideas. These innovative ideas led to the reform of French education. He advocated a child-centered education and introduced the printing of school newspapers in the classroom and their exchange with those of other schools. Freinet-based schools still exist in Europe, Africa, and South America. None exist in the Anglophone world where it appears his influence has slipped through the cracks. In the English-speaking world, Freinet is virtually unknown, although most schools unknowingly implement his ideas: the printing press he used for printing in the classroom and exchanging texts through the mail have been replaced by computers, printers, the Internet, and fax machines to exchange texts with other schools. Freinet is also conspicuously absent in educational and pedagogical books and anthologies in English. This paper on Celestin Freinet aims to redress this injustice. (Contains 61 notes.) (Author/BT)

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Célestin Freinet (1896-1966): A Most Unappreciated Educator in the Anglophone World

Victor Acker, Ph.D.

SO 032 610

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It takes 100 years to discover a good idea,
Another 100 to understand it,
And still another hundred to put it in practice.
(Otto Ludwig)

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Abstract

Célestin Freinet had a major influence on education in France. During World War I, he was critically injured in 1917 and convalesced for two years. During World War II, he was incarcerated by the Vichy government for his Communist tendencies and, in the 1950s, the French Communist Party harassed him for straying from their hard-line ideologies.

His intellectual output was prodigious: he taught elementary school, founded his own Freinet School in 1935, organized conferences for more than 40 years, and wrote 18 books and nearly 3,000 articles in 17 journals that are a repository of his educational ideas. These innovative ideas led to reforming French education, advocating a child-centered education, introducing printing school newspapers in the classroom and exchanging them with other schools. Freinet-based schools still exist in Europe, Africa and South America. None exist in the Anglophone world where it appears that his influence has slipped through the cracks.

In the English-speaking world, Freinet is virtually unknown, although most schools unknowingly implement his ideas: the printing press Freinet used for printing in the classroom and exchanging texts through the mail have been replaced by computers, printers, the Internet and fax machines to exchange texts with other schools. Freinet also is conspicuously absent in educational, pedagogical books and anthologies written in English. This paper on Célestin Freinet will redress this injustice.

March 2000

Célestin Freinet (1896-1966): A Most Unappreciated Educator in the Anglophone World

Introduction

Célestin Freinet was a French educator who had a major influence on education in France and other countries. He fought in World War I, was critically injured in 1917, and it took him two years to recuperate. He resumed teaching elementary school and, while teaching, he developed innovative ideas in education that led to a reform of French education and the development of several educational associations. During World War II, he was incarcerated by the fascist government of Vichy.

I. Célestin Freinet's Intellectual Output

His intellectual output was sizeable. Between 1920 and 1954, he taught school, founded his own school, and wrote close to 3,000 articles and 16 books. He organized conferences and made presentations of his educational ideas for more than 34 years. He published his ideas in 17 journals. Based on his experience, writings and ideas, he transformed education in France by shifting the centerpiece of education away from the teacher in a magisterial role to a child-centered education. He also influenced educational and intellectual thought in many parts of the world, such as Freinet-inspired schools in Belgium, Holland, Poland, Brazil and Denmark; there are no such schools in the Anglophone world.

A. Journal Writing

Célestin Freinet's first writing was in journals, and these articles were published in many periodicals; their titles suggest the wide range of issues he addressed[1]. He was a contributing editor to 10 journals dealing mostly with politics, activism and education:

- *L'École Émancipée (1920-37)*
- *Clarté (1921-25)*

- *Notre Arme (1922-35)*
- *L'Internationale de l'Enseignement (1923-28)*
- *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle (1929-39)*
- *Monde (1929)*
- *Pédagogie Soviétique (1932-33)*
- *Le Problème Sexuel (1934)*
- *Les Humbles (1936-37)*
- *La Nouvelle Critique (1950)*

His contributions to these journals reflected the breadth and depth of his knowledge and interest. For example, in the journal *Le Problème Sexuel*, he wrote a psycho-pedagogical article[2] on sexuality in which he posited, "Unhealthy sexual curiosity is heightened when children are not given frank, honest and truthful answers about sex by adults (including teachers)"; in the journal *Notre Arme*, he developed one of his teaching methods, the Interscholastic Exchanges *(La Correspondance Interscolaire)*. He wrote about alternative forms of education, teaching in rural schools, teachers and students, schooling and life. In his early years, he wrote on political and educational issues such as:

- *the origins of the May 1 Celebration (Clarté, April 1921)*
- *visits to German schools (L'École Émancipée, October 1922)*
- *visits to Russian schools (Notre Arme, October 1925)*
- *analysis of Russian pedagogy (L'École Émancipée, January 1926)*

His sizeable bibliography shows that he wrote extensively on a great number and variety of pedagogical and political issues.

B. His Journals

Freinet was the founder of and main contributor to these seven journals:

- *L'Imprimerie à l'École (1926-32)*
- *Bibliothèque du Travail (BT) (1932-now)*
- *L'Éducateur Prolétarien (1933-39)*
- *Brochures d'Éducation Nouvelle Populaire (BENP) (1937-now)*
- *L'Éducateur (1939-1964)*
- *Bibliothèque de l'École Moderne (BEM) (1945-now)*
- *Techniques de Vie (1954-60)*

These journals reflect his pedagogical and educational focus; they cover most aspects of what is now

called the Freinet Technique. Three of his journals are still in existence – BT, BENP and BEM – and are printed and distributed on a regular and worldwide basis by the PEMF *(Publications de l'École Moderne Française)*. Many Freinet practitioners in and out of France use these booklets and brochures for their lesson plans or as additional reference material.

C. The Start of His Proletarian Ideas

Very early in his career as an educator, Freinet was attracted to proletarian ideas and embraced the Left-leaning political ideas of Marx and Lenin. He espoused many of the pedagogical ideas developed in post-1917 Russia Iby Anton S. Makarenko (1888-1939), who studied and wrote about the education and re-adaptation of troubled teenagers.

Freinet's first published article was "The Capitalism of Culture" written for the May 22, 1920, edition of *l'École Émancipée*. He then co-wrote with Heirich Siemss in the *École Émancipée* of October 23, 1920 a detailed account of the creation of The International Teachers Union[3] at the 1920 Convention of Bordeaux:

> *"The socialist-leaning International Society of Pedagogues[4] will fight hate between people and wars by creating a very unusual school, an active school. This school, besides teaching various subjects to children, would take care of the development of their soul.*
> *"They will create a central office that will inform the various teachers' groups on the different aspects of pedagogy and psychology, and the organization of the schools and the education of teachers."*
> *"The International will brief the different groups through their newspaper, written in French and in Esperanto, and will establish a central clearing office for correspondence[5] between teachers and pupils."*

He also wrote about a new spirit in the school in Pedagogy of the Personality[6]:

> *"That befriending the youth in his classroom is necessary for the teacher. Education is a reflection of life. What is giving us so many difficulties is that we no longer look at education as an interaction between a teacher and his students, but as an abstract idea . . . we seem to have lost our soul.*
> *"In the school, the teacher who prepared his lessons planned everything based on teaching plans. Where was the spontaneity, the independence of pupils? We have only considered education as a necessity for life. They were annihilating the soul since educating the intellect was not even a consideration!"*

Early in his professional life, Freinet averred that he was going to be an active educator to the proletariat. For example, in October 1920, after being barely one-month tenured, he made it clear that he opposed the use of "trade union pedagogy": he preferred using "pedagogy of the proletariat" instead.

In late 1926, his writing began to focus more on his pedagogical vision, and the content and tenor of his writing changed to reflect his growing interest in proletarian education. In this phase of his intellectual development, most of his writings consisted of articles on:

- *the revolution in schools in L'École Émancipée of November 1927;*
- *new types of schools in L'École Émancipée of April 1927;*
- *printing in school in L'École Émancipée of June 1926;*
- *critiques of government guidelines in L'École Émancipée of 1927.*

Most Freinet scholars think that these articles express his thoughts more spontaneously and directly than his books which were heavily edited by his wife Élise. Much of his pedagogy was sharpened by his close contact with other educators (e.g., Ovide Decroly, Jean Piaget, Pierre Bovet and Adolphe Ferrière) and reading of important educational treatises (e.g.,Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *L'Émile* and Paul Robin's[7] work at his orphanage in Cempuis). He also read and reviewed other pedagogues' books when translated into French: Jan Ligthart[8], Maria Montessori[9], William Sanderson[10] and John Dewey[11].

D. His Books

Freinet wrote 18 books (11 published during his life). The first six were begun while interned by the Vichy government in Chibron[12]. After his release in October 1941, he was placed under house arrest at his in-laws' home in Vallouise (High-Alps), and joined the Resistance movement in 1943. He was unable to teach since the military authorities requisitioned his school. The World War II years were a blessing in disguise as it gave him time to write more articles for his journals, conference speeches, seminars and books. These books were started or completed when his school reopened in 1946:

- *L'Éducation du Travail. 1942-1943;*

- *L'École Moderne Française. 1943 (revised in 1945);*
- *Les Dits de Mathieu. 1946 (revised in 1954);*
- *Essai de Psychologie Sensible. 1950 (revised in 1966);*
- *L'Apprentissage du Dessin. 1951.*

The next group of books were:

- *Les Genèses. 1953 (revised in 1964);*
- *Le Journal Scolaire. 1957;*
- *Méthode Naturelle de Lecture. 1961;*
- *Les Invariants Pédagogiques. 1964.*

These books make up most of Freinet's views on education and his Movement; other educational ideas are expressed in articles he wrote in journals.

Élise and their daughter Madeleine[13] published seven of his books posthumously:

- *L'Apprentissage de La Lecture*. 1961;
- *Souvenirs d'Enfance*. 1972;
- *Pour L'École du Peuple*. 1977;
- *L'Education du Travail*. 1978;
- *La Santé Mentale de l'Enfant*. 1979;
- *Perspectives d'Éducation Populaire*. 1979;
- *Touché*. 1996.

Contrasting these books with Freinet's other books, Élise Freinet's strong editorial influence is very visible: the end product is glossier, and the sentences are "more to the point" as Freinet was known to ramble in his discourse.

Additionally, Élise Freinet – a writer, an artist and an activist in her own right – wrote two very important books on Freinet and the Freinet movement:

- *Naissance d'une Pédagogie Populaire*. 1968;
- *L'Itinéraire de Célestin Freinet*. 1977.

For many years, Élise Freinet's books on her famous husband were the only sources available to study his work and his ideas. Although the French Government has become relatively more open in giving access to previously unavailable archival material pertaining to Freinet, the French Communist Party

(PCF) has shown a great reluctance to open their archives.

E. Activism

Aside from writing articles and books, he established, organized and took part in educational conferences *(Congrès Freinet)*. The first one took place in Tours[14] (1927) and was held on the fringes of the Federation of the Teachers' Union convention. Until he resigned from national education in 1935, he regularly attended these conventions; the last one he attended as a teacher in public education was the 1935 convention in Angers[15]. When freed from the yoke of national education, Freinet held his first convention in Moulins[16]. As was the custom, Freinet held these conventions yearly during the Easter holidays, but they were canceled between 1940 and 1945. The April 1947 convention in Dijon[17] was the first to be held after World War II. Freinet always attended his conventions, but due to poor health, he was unable to attend the 1966 convention in Perpignan[18] -- the last one held in his lifetime.

At these gatherings, French teachers and educators from the Movement and many from all over the world -- Japan, Spain, Poland, Russia, Belgium and England -- came together to hear Freinet speak. It was his charismatic personality that made these seminars very intense, and gave these participants a renewed sense of purpose to carry on the Freinet Movement.

To formalize these conventions, *La Coopérative de l'enseignement laïc*[19] (CEL) was founded in 1928 by Freinet. The CEL became responsible for the production and distribution of his pedagogical bulletins (*L'Imprimerie à l'école)*[20], children's school newspaper (*La Gerbe)*[21], and many *Pathé-Baby* educational 8mm movies he produced. He also started a new educational bulletin, *Bibliothèque de travail*[22] (BT) in 1932. In 1947 Freinet renamed his movement *L'Institut coopératif de l'École Moderne* (ICEM)[23] to let the outside world know that he was back from the war and at the forefront of the battle to modernize the educational system. The ICEM publishes all the BTs and other publications used in

the schools that follow Freinet's techniques.

Although he was a teacher and a prolific writer, he energetically addressed the educational and social issues of his day, including problems about class size, the lack of adequate pedagogical material, and poor working conditions that forced teachers to abide by antiquated guidelines, such as being rotated from school to school without their consent or being terminated without a reason. His important influence in education lies in the substance of his ideas.

F. Politics

During his lifetime, his educational ideas were controversial. His method was more student-centered rather than teacher-oriented, and his pedagogy and teaching were strongly influenced by Communism. He was a strong proponent of printing in the classroom, and extended his printing by producing a school newspaper that was exchanged with other schools.

He derided the Minister of Education's official instructions of 1923[24] as he felt that these instructions were not sympathetic to the needs of his students whose parents were the working poor. Followers of the Right (*La Droite*) as well as those on the Left (*La Gauche*) of the political spectrum criticized him: the Right-leaning politicians and educators were against him because he was a member of the French Communist Party (PCF or *Parti Communiste Français*), his teaching was proletariat-based, and he gave a voice to the students. The Left-leaning progressive educators were mistrustful of Freinet because he was not a university professor yet attempted to lead them into unchartered waters.

II. Political Foundation of Freinet's Pedagogy

A. Introduction

France is a country where changes in political ideas have been closely associated with

philosophical ideas. Whether it was the 17th century of René Descartes, the 18th century of Voltaire and Robespierre, the 19th century of Napoleon, the 20th century of Jean-Paul Sartre, André Gide, André Malraux, Simone de Beauvoir, Lenin, Hitler, or even the May 1968 Student Revolt with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, political ideas have had an impact on education and society. Freinet was not immune to these upheavals: his political beliefs and his educational ideas were a volatile mix in a volatile time in French history, and they strongly affected and influenced his teaching and writing.

Freinet fought during World War I and was seriously injured on the battlefield. While convalescing, he learned of the fall of the Czar of Russia and the beginning of a new communist Russia[25]. He witnessed the rise of fascism in Europe (Spain, Italy and Germany), and excoriated the rise of the French fascist movement (the Right or *Extrême-Droite*) that targeted him for his leftist leanings. He was labeled Communist, Bolshevik or Anarchist by his enemies who did not know the difference.

B. Influence of Communism on French Intellectuals

From 1925 to 1939, being Communist or Leftist was the only possible intellectual haven for many thinkers and intellectuals of that era (e.g., Sartre, Gide, de Beauvoir, etc.). With the rise of fascism in France – and many influential politicians espousing these ideas – some of these thinkers were persecuted (Freinet), while others (Sartre and Malraux) thrived with books opposing the movement that presaged the nefarious rise of Hitler in Nazi Germany.

A book by the French historian François Furet[26] detailed the relationships existing between people, Communism and the Soviet myth, and why intellectuals took refuge in it, from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 to the end of World War II. With the end of the war and Communism on the winning side, the exodus of many intellectuals stopped since they were able to express themselves freely

without hiding behind an ideology.

C. The Persecution of a Communist Teacher in Saint-Paul

In 1930, Freinet was appointed school director at Saint-Paul. He became the teacher and innovator for the children of working-class parents living in town, creating instant conflicts with the Right-wing mayor of this municipality. In the years 1930-34, Right-wing politics and politicians ruled and their fight with a "Bolshevik" or Communist teacher ended five years later when Freinet was forced out of public education, and opened his own École Freinet in Vence in 1936. This persecution even lasted during the days of the Vichy government as he was labeled "Communist/ political agitator" and incarcerated in 1941. Although his school in Vence was turned over to a Polish-Catholic Youth Agency, it was later pillaged and ransacked by the Vichy troops running away from the Allies who landed in the South of France in August 1944.

D. Freinet Is Challenged by the PCF

Freinet leaned toward Communism since his youth. When he went to Russia in the 1920s, he returned from that trip an overt admirer of their pedagogical ideas, such as the use of psycho-pedagogy in working with "problem children". Élise was already committed to the PCF, and Freinet joined the Party in 1929.

He contributed to several Left-leaning and Communist-oriented educational publications (*Clarté, Internationale de l'Enseignement* and *Notre Arme)* for many years. Freinet's roots in the Communist Party can be found in an article he wrote in *L' École Émancipée*[27] in which he said:

> *"We are outraged teachers, we are cutraged union members, but we are not teachers in full revolt. This would be the way to achieve our goals since without a revolution in the school, there will be no political and economical revolution."*

Although Freinet was a Communist sympathizer since 1922, and a member since 1927, it did not deter

the PCF from viciously attacking him (1949-54). Although Freinet felt secure in his beliefs as a moderate member of the PCF, he touted his affiliation while refusing many of the hard-line PCF's diktats, but he introduced a great number of Communist-driven educational ideas in his teaching . . . but this was not good enough for the Communist Party of the early 1950s. Maurice Thorez,[28] the hard-liner Stalinist who ruled the PCF, took umbrage with Freinet for not "supporting" the official Communist pedagogy and unleashed virulent attacks against him. Freinet firmly believed that what he was teaching was basically a Communist pedagogy and did not take very kindly to these incessant attacks.

Two influential Communist-intellectual publications (*La Nouvelle Critique* and *L'École et la Nation*) continued attacking him from June 1949 through April 1954 as the PCF leaders viewed him as being *too bourgeois* because he wanted to continue teaching his way, and not the PCF's Stalinist-driven educational tenets' way. He felt that these inflexible educational ideas were in apposition to his own ideas. Freinet was viewed as being too moderate for the Stalinist-oriented PCF of the early 1950s and he was hounded by his former friend Georges Cogniot, editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*[29], who wrote against Freinet in *La Nouvelle Critique*[30] from February 1949 to August 1952. Professor Georges Snyders[31] led a chorus of teachers and educators who criticized Freinet for refusing to align his teachings to those advocated by the PCF in the April 1950 issue of *La Nouvelle Critique*.

With the Party's support, this assault opened the floodgates of steady attacks from many members and sympathizers, teachers and educators, who reiterated their criticism of Freinet's "refusal to teach the PCF-directed education."

These very derogatory charges would have stopped earlier had Cogniot published a conciliatory letter Freinet wrote to him on June 12, 1951. In this letter, Freinet agreed with Cogniot that some of his ideas were not always in tune with those from the PCF, but he was asking him to

understand his reasons. Regrettably Cogniot did not publish this letter and concealed it in his archives that were given to the town of Saint Denis[32] I discovered it in June 1996.

E. His Political Twilight

The acceptance Freinet received from the PCF leaders at the beginning of his career had a very positive influence on his writing and his approach to pedagogy, but after these leaders criticized him (1949-54), his subsequent writings seem to suggest that he lost "the fire and brimstone" that was present prior to this rejection. He fought back and eventually these attacks ceased. Many people close to Freinet felt that the schism that resulted from being repudiated by the PCF – and the virulent and incessant attacks – took the wind out of Freinet's sails and resulted in significantly diminishing his intellectual output.

Until 1954, Freinet's writing was constructive, controversial and vibrant like the era in which he lived. After 1954, although his creative output slowly waned, at the Freinet Conferences, he was still a most charismatic speaker and participant.

From 1954 until Freinet's death in 1966, these conferences attracted worldwide attendees from Brazil, Poland, Russia, Norway, etc., but no known representatives from English-speaking countries. At these conferences, the attendees highlighted past and current achievements, but Freinet did not offer any new and significant ideas.

Even after Freinet's death in October 1966, Fernande Seclet-Riou, a high-ranking member in the PCF and a former *Inspecteur d'Académie* (school inspector) from the Ministry of Education, attacked Freinet's pedagogy and called him "redundant," thus trying to destroy his legacy. More controversy ensued. Unrelated to Seclet-Riou's comment, the Freinet Movement fell into a state of disarray and only recently has it started to expand in and out of France.

In 1996, the PCF finally acknowledged their mistake in attacking Freinet. In the August 10, 1996 issue of *l'Humanité*, they admitted that they "erred in unjustly attacking Freinet."

III. Intellectual Foundations of Freinet's Pedagogy

Freinet was a most significant educational writer of the 20th century with very important educational ideas and thoughts. Freinet's genius was based on his ability to distill the essential elements of other educators' ideas, to perceive what would work from their ideas, and to recreate them as his own; he was very open about it and used to say that he was like a bee taking honey from the flowers. As an avid reader and a prolific writer, he could meld many educators' ideas into a coherent set of educational concepts, and six important elements of his pedagogy were:

A. Teachers are not dictators,
B. Motivation makes students learn,
C. Participation implies freedom,
D. Participation means self-confidence,
E. Classrooms are part of the world,
F. Freinet's pedagogy is a participatory pedagogy.

The following is a brief description of how Freinet applied these tenets in his classrooms.

A. Teachers are not Dictators.[33]

Freinet wrote that teachers[34] have an indispensable role to play. He recommended they should not monopolize classroom time since students should have a strong voice in classroom life. The teacher should remove the platform on which his desk towered over his students and place it at the same level as his students' desks. Additionally, they should adapt these desks to how the classroom is supposed to function, i.e. a conference hall, a manual workshop, a reading hall, etc.

B. Motivation Makes Students Learn.[35]

Free texts[36] in the classroom give students reasons to write well, spell correctly and have a precise style. Free text (*texte libre*) refers to a compilation of the various texts written by the students – they write about the discoveries in their daily lives and impart this information to others. Students[37] express their interests by discussing their observations or by bringing objects of interest, while their correspondent classes receive texts, drawings, the school newspaper and other materials from the class. The "free text" is in apposition to "text books"

(*manuels scolaires*) and is the core of the Freinet Method.

C. Participation Implies Freedom.[38]

Freinet's educational method allows children to discover the vastness and the exigencies of freedom as it reduces what is "forbidden in a classroom." It allows them to choose a method of working – individually or collectively. Students discover real freedom, one that is not whimsical or fanciful, by engaging in self-expression.

D. Participation Implies Self-Confidence.[39]

Freinet seeks to make students feel as if they are capable of progressing. He is convinced that all children can succeed, albeit in different domains – some are manually proficient, or skillful orators, or fine writers, and others are good observers.

E. Classrooms are Part of The World.[40]

The children in a classroom, interested in events and objects, feel the need to retain a written imprint of their discoveries, especially if they want to impart this information to others, and feel the need to express themselves in writing. Parents and friends read the texts produced in Freinet's classroom in the village of Bar-sur-Loup (Maritime-Alps) but this was not enough as he felt that his children wanted and deserved a larger audience. In 1926, his friend and fellow teacher, René Daniel of Saint-Philibert-de-Trégunc (Brittany), bought a printing press, similar to the one Freinet had, to introduce "free expression" and "free text" in his classroom. Once the exchange began between these two teachers, a new life seeped into their respective classrooms. The children adopted the "free text", calling it "the page of life": it became a key element of the *interscholastic correspondence* and the *printing in the school.* It was the logical tie between school, social milieu and human interaction. This was the origin of the Interscholastic Exchanges[41], an essential aspect of the Freinet Method.

F. Freinet's Pedagogy is a Participatory Pedagogy

Traditional teaching allows little participation of the student: he is considered to be the "receiver" and is not given enough credit for what he can "bring" to the classroom. He is in an inferior situation: he must listen, record the teacher's words and try to understand them. This situation very quickly feels heavy to him since the values that the teacher wants to transmit do not always correspond to the interest of the child (grammar rules, math "rule of three", geography of known and unknown regions, etc.). Although society wants to form responsible individuals, they intend to attain their goal by force, thus putting the child in an inferior situation. Freinet proposes making the classroom the permanent center of interest to the child in order to remedy this situation.

Freinet's thirst for scholarship through reading and developing ideas was not a difficult. He wrote

extensively on topics that mattered to him: physical education (*L'École Émancipée*, April 1924), hypothesis of modern science (*op. cit.*, February 1925), coeducational teaching (*op. cit.*, December 1926), and discipline in the school (*op. cit.*, March 1928).

His ideas were rooted in his life experience, his environment, and the writers and their ideas about whom he wrote. Writers from various walks of life, countries and centuries were very helpful and important in Freinet's development of his pedagogical ideas.

- *Ferrière and his L'École Active (L'École Émancipée of November 1922);*
- *Robin and his orphanage in Cempuis (in Clarté)*
- *Decroly and his École Decroly in Brussels (op. cit., April 1925).*

He read and was knowledgeable in the writing and educational ideas of François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne. Other authors that influenced Freinet are:

- *Ferdinand Buisson:* ***Dictionnaire Pédagogique*** *(1882);*
- *Edith Pieczynska:* ***R.Tagore****, in L'École Émancipée (March 1923);*
- *J.W.L. Gunning:* ***Jan Ligthart****, L'École Émancipée (October 1923);*
- *H.G. Wells:* ***William F. Sanderson****, L'École Émancipée (June 1925).*

IV. Still Unknown in the Anglophone World

It is a paradox that in England and the rest of the English-speaking world, Freinet has remained unknown. Schools that use the Internet to exchange ideas are in effect updating the interscholastic exchanges that Freinet organized by mail.

Language is obviously not an obstacle: Freinet has been translated in Spanish, Portuguese, German, Polish, Russian, Danish, Polish and Japanese. Current library catalogues (OCLC) show only three of his books translated into English since 1990, and yet there are no books written *about*[42] Freinet in English. Moreover, Freinet is conspicuously absent in educational and pedagogical books and anthologies written in English. Why?

A most plausible explanation is that English-based culture rejects Cartesian theories, opposes a centralized administration, prefers pragmatism over theory, and the "know-how" rather than the "know-how-to-say-it." England viewed Freinet pedagogy, which he formally introduced at a New Education Conference of Cheltenham in July 1936, as a Mediterranean import into the Anglo-Saxon world. Freinet reacted to the pompous speeches[43] by saying:

> *"Speeches were too long, and the so-called idealists' discussions were really scholastic and philosophical games. We have exposed our proletarian common sense denouncing doubtful values, we believe we have made known where we are heading, and we have expressed the dignity of a new ideal, and the devotion of our followers. The popular uprising in the countries freed from reactionary rulers creates [for the teachers] new problems that we must solve."*

From Robert Baden-Powell's founding of the Boy Scout movement in 1908, to A.S. Neill's *Free Child* (1953), England saw itself as an exporter of pedagogical ideas, not an importer. It is still the case today where most of the pedagogical ideas are English-driven. Freinet had practically no impact on England when he went there in 1936, and his absence is still felt today.

To Freinet, the importance was to offer the workers a pedagogy that would free them, but Baden-Powell and his movement blocked Freinet's ideas from expanding into England.

Who was Baden-Powell?

Baron Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941) was the founder of the Boy Scouts. As he was leading British soldiers during the Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa, he realized that most of the soldiers under his command lacked basic survival skills. After leaving the British Army, he founded the Boy Scout movement in 1908.

Baden-Powell's 1908 book, *Scouting for Boys*, showed his genius as an educator. Translated into French by the Swiss pedagogue Bovet, Freinet reviewed the translation *Éclaireurs* in Henri Barbusse's magazine *Monde*[44].

According to Freinet, scouting was not a proletarian organization, it was a reactionary-based ideology. At the April 1926 Scouting Congress in London, Baden-Powell stated:

> *"I am reaffirming the high value of the scouting movement, especially in light of the declarations made by the bolshevik leaders in Moscow who despise our movement and affirm that the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides are the two most powerful organizations preventing the young generation to be conquered and attracted to the bolshevik ideas."*

and advised his scout leaders:

> *"As you enroll the young ones, remember that whether the boys are rich or poor, live in a palace or in a slum, we all live in the same nation, and that we have to defend our country against the enemy. Let us be united!*
> *"An organization like ours will miss its goal if it did not give its members a knowledge of religion[45].*
> *"Our master plan is to mold a young boy's character – when he is full of enthusiasm – and shape him into a boy scout while encouraging the development of his individuality."*

No wonder Freinet could not make any headway against a pedagogy that was essentially anti-proletarian and reactionary! Although today the mind-set is different in England and the Anglophone world, Freinet remains largely unknown.

V. Conclusion

After his death, recognition of his work and achievement was expressed by many of his colleagues. A sense of his enduring contribution to education may be found in a few of the eulogies published after his death.

A. Eulogizing Freinet

Jean Haccuria, Inspector of schools in Brussels, wrote in the October 13, 1966 issue *of L'Éducation Populaire* that. . .

> *"When World War II started, the pedagogy of the Modern School was very precise and encompassed all the [Freinet] domains of education: free expression [expression libre], free-text [texte libre], the printing in the school [l'imprimerie à l'école], freehand drawing [dessin libre], engraving on linoleum [gravure sur lino], free theater [théatre libre] current events [histoire vivante], and many others. For these and many other accomplishments, we realize that his life as a pioneer was cut down too short."*

This paragraph summarizes Freinet's ideas which are centered on children, away from teachers.

Professor Guy Avanzini[46], from the Université de Lyon, Secretary of the Société Binet- Simon, and president of the École Freinet wrote:

> *"Freinet is the only one that has proposed teaching methods that thousands of teachers, in France and abroad, appreciate and use on a daily basis. Not only did he perceive the outdated character of didactism, but he proposed an alternative pedagogy. Also, without really being very explicit on this, his psychological methods to deal with children are quite remarkable as far as the techniques for the adaptation and the re-adaptation of children-at-risk."*

Professor Avanzini, who knew Freinet well, carries on Freinet's work today. He understands the importance of Freinet's "alternative pedagogy," and is one of his staunchest defender.

In a recent book on Freinet, Patrick Boumard[47] offered his interpretation of Freinet's vision:

> *"We notice that despite the many pedagogical upheavals that took place in this century, Freinet was a forerunner, and he remains the major reference point of those who look into the globalization of education. The many educators, who had to face dissension, criticism and exclusion, went down the same road taken by Freinet: a road not always paved with roses."*

Professor Boumard was accurate in his assessment of Freinet, because Freinet has affected 20th century pedagogy, and has changed its dynamics through his tenets of instruction.

In 1969, three years after Freinet's death, his followers created an association called "Friends of Freinet" (*Amis de Freinet*) to keep the "flame alive": they meet yearly in October in Brittany, and publish a semi-annual journal distributed in Europe, Japan, Chile, and one copy in the United States. Most issues contain articles about Freinet, archival material, and reflections on education by current and former Freinet teachers.

B. The Importance of Freinet

When Célestin Freinet started the interscholastic exchanges in 1926, he never envisioned that with the advent of the fax and the computer age, his vision of a global education would live on. The school journals, the printing press and the Interscholastic Exchanges have been the basic components of the Freinet pedagogy. Freinet was able to propose to teachers a particularly exhilarating chore:

service to the pupil. He managed to give back to the word "teach" its deepest sense: the one who teaches, who creates a man from the child of whom he was in charge. Even if we do not always follow him in his educational methods, we have to rethink our methods, to get out of our routine. It is essential and in Freinet's own words[48]:

> *"There is no such thing as a 'Freinet Method', but there is a vast pedagogic movement of renovation and re-adaptation for which we have set the basics and the principles. It is like a collective forward march that allows all to advance effectively, progress, organize and live. This spirit is the result of the work and the enthusiasm we have created and we are maintaining as it expresses the spirit and the activity of our group."*[49]

Today, the printer has replaced the printing press and the faxes and e-mail transmissions have replaced the mail bag. . . all this came out of the mind of a man who was tagged the "man with a printing machine". . . the French Gutenberg[50].

As this brief account reveals, Freinet was a significant educational thinker of this century. Once in a while, we come across genius. Many times, we do not recognize it and life goes on. I was fortunate to have come across it almost seven years ago. To me, Freinet represents a genuine individual who has revolutionized education.

To learn more about Freinet, you can consult the book Célestin Freinet written by the author of this paper. It was published in July 2000 by Greenwood Press and has the following Internet links:

http://www.greenwood.com/<Book on Freinet>
http://www.info-france-usa.org/culture/books/releases/acker.html
http://www.amazon.fr/exec/obidos/ASIN/0313309949/171-7458277-4013001

Addendum: Chronological Biography of Freinet.

1896: Célestin Freinet is born on October 15 in Gars (Maritime-Alps), a small village close to Nice and the Italian border.

1912: Freinet takes the entrance exams and is accepted at the **école normale d'instituteurs** of Nice (Maritime-Alps) to become an elementary schoolteacher.

1914: He does not finish his teacher-training education when World War I is declared. Before being drafted, he substitutes for three months at the St-Cézaire (Maritime-Alps) school.

1915: In April, the army drafts him as an officer-candidate.

1917: In April, he is critically wounded in the battle of *Chemin des Dames* near Soissons (Aisne)[51]. In 1920, he writes about his wounds, being near-death and convalescing[52].

1918: He substitutes in La Croix-Villard, another village in the Maritime-Alps, where he meets Élise Lagier-Bruno, a schoolteacher and a gifted wood engraver, who teaches nearby. They marry in 1926.

1919: He is appointed adjunct-teacher at the Boys' School of Bar-sur-Loup (Maritime-Alps), a small town near Grasse (Maritime-Alps). He joins an anarcho-syndicalist teachers' union and becomes active in the union's splinter group affiliated with the Communist Party.

1920: In the summer, Freinet visits the Altona School, near Hamburg, Germany, known as *an anarchist* or *libertarian school*. He does not care for their teaching methods.[53]

1921: In June, he attends the second *Congrès de la Ligue Internationale pour l'Éducation Nouvelle* in Montreux (Switzerland), where he becomes acquainted with Swiss educators from the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau of Geneva: Édouard Claparède, Pierre Bovet and Adolphe Ferrière.

1922: In June, he buys a CINUP printing press and, with his students, prints a "free text"[54] of the narrative of the snail race they staged.

1923: In June, with a group of teachers, he visits Russia and meets with its new rulers to lecture on his pedagogical model and travels at length in this country. This trip influences his future views on education and he wrote extensively on the Soviet pedagogical system.

1925: Freinet initiates an exchange with the teacher Durand, from Villeurbannes (outside Lyon)

1926: René Daniel, a teacher in Trégunc-St-Philibert, also buys a CINUP printing press in June and becomes Freinet's first regular correspondent. The Interscholastic Exchange is created in October.

1927: In July, he establishes *La Coopérative de L'Enseignement Laïc* (C.E.L.) with the six core members of his movement.

1928: Freinet is appointed director of the elementary school in Saint-Paul-de-Vence (Maritime-Alps) and publishes many articles on various topics, including Interscholastic Exchanges.

1929: Birth of their daughter, Madeleine. His wife, Élise, is named adjunct-teacher at the Girls' School of Saint-Paul-de-Vence. He joins the PCF.

1930: The Freinet Movement has now grown to 250 members.

1932-1934: Freinet faces many obstacles created by agitators, politicians and officials who were antagonistic to his innovative teaching methods and his Communist leanings[55]. He experiences the rise of fascism. This difficult episode in Freinet's life is usually referenced as "L'Affaire Saint-Paul."

1935: He is forced to leave public education in Saint-Paul-de-Vence and builds a new school in Vence (Maritime-Alps) called L'École Freinet.[56]

1938-1946: Between 1939 and 1946, L'École Freinet closes during World War II. As a known political agitator, the Vichy government of Maréchal Pétain confines Freinet to the Chibron Work Camp (Var) in March 1940. He is released on October 1941 due to poor health[57], placed under house arrest, and joins the Résistance Movement in 1943. The School is rented to a Czech Orphanage until 1944. After they leave, the local Vichy administration occupies it, but ransacks it. The School reopens in late 1946.

1949: The movie **L'École Buissonnière**[58] is directed by Jean-Paul Le Chanois based on a script written by Élise Freinet[59]. This movie, financed by the PCF, describes the pedagogical quest of a modern teacher, "an innovator" named Mr. Pascal (Freinet).

1952-1954: Freinet faces virulent attacks orchestrated by Georges Cogniot and Georges Snyders of the PCF [60] as being *too bourgeois*. It causes a chasm with the PCF.

1966: Freinet passes away in October in Vence and is buried in Gars.

Upon hearing of Freinet's death, one of his friends, the educator Jean Vial said:

"*Though Freinet is dead, he is among the dead who live passionately.*"[61]

Notes:

1. In parenthesis are the years of his contributions.
2. Freinet, Célestin. "Le problème sexuel et la pédagogie nouvelle". Le Problème Sexuel. Juillet 1934. pp. 6-8.
3. International Teachers Union = Internationale de l'Enseignement
4. International Socialist Society of Pedagogy = Internationale Socialiste de Pédagogie
5. A marker in Freinet's quest to establish Interscholastic Exchanges as relevant to his teaching method.
6. Pedagogy of the Personality = Pédagogik deines Wesens (German)
7. Paul Robin's work was detailed in Gabriel Giroud's book Cempuis.
8. Freinet, Célestin. "Jan Ligthart, sa vie et son oeuvre, par J.W.L. Gunning". L'École Émancipée. Octobre 1923.
9. Freinet, Célestin. "A propos de la méthode Montessori". L'École Émancipée. Février 1924.
10. Freinet, Célestin. "Un grand éducateur moderne: William Sanderson (H.G. Wells)". L'École Émancipée. N° 38. p.479-481. 21 juin 1925.
11. Freinet, Célestin. "Dewey et l'enseignement de l'histoire". L'École Émancipée. Mai 1924.

12. A Work Camp in the Var department
13. His wife, Élise, died in 1983, and his daughter, Madeleine, (or Baloulette) was born in 1929.
14. A town located 140 miles south of Paris.
15. Angers (Maine & Loire): a town located 184 miles southwest of Paris.
16. Moulins (Allier): a town located 180 miles south of Paris
17. Dijon (Burgundy): a town located 192 miles southeast of Paris.
18. Perpignan: a town located in the Pyrénées, 570 miles south of Paris, close to Spain's Catalonia region.
19. CEL = Cooperative of secular or lay teaching
20. Imprimerie à l'école = printing in school (which was started in 1926)
21. La Gerbe = the Sheaf
22. BT = library of work (more than 300 bulletins have been produced)
23. ICEM = Cooperative Institute of the Modern School
24. Arrêté ministériel modifiant les programmes des écoles primaires élémentaires. Paris. 23 février 1923.
25. The U.S.S.R. was founded in 1922.
26. Furet, François. Le passé d'une illusion: essai sur l'idée communiste au XXème siècle. Robert Laffont.1995.
27. Freinet, Célestin. "L'Internationale de l'Enseignement: Pour la Révolution à l'école". L'École Émancipée. N° 4. p. 15. 23 octobre 1920.
28. Maurice Thorez (1900-1964): Politician, member of the PCF since 1920, and secretary of the Party from 1930 to 1964. He died while resting at a resort on the Black Sea. His biography is *Fils du peuple* (Son of The People).
29. *L'Humanité* (Mankind) was founded in 1904 by Jean Jaurès as a Socialist newspaper. After the foundation of the PCF in 1920, it became the official organ of that Party.
30. The Communist Party's intellectual publication.
31. I interviewed him a year ago at his home in Paris in April 1966. He admitted, that looking back, he attacked the Freinet Method without knowing too much about it. I believe he was told to do so by the leaders of his Party.
32. Saint-Denis: a town 10 miles north of Paris. Its Basilica is the resting place for most French royalty.
33. Plus de dictature du maître.
34. Freinet, Célestin. Essai de Psychologie Sensible. Delachaux & Niestlé. Neuchâtel. 1966.
35. Intense motivation de l'activité à l'école.
36. Freinet, Célestin. "Le texte libre". L'Éducateur. N° 6. 15 décembre 1946.
37. Freinet, Célestin. La santé mentale de l'enfant. François Maspero. Paris. 1979.
38. Participation signifie liberté.
39. Participer c'est acquérir une confiance en soi.
40. La classe fait partie de l'univers.
41. Freinet, C. et S. Carmilet. "Correspondance interscolaire". L'Éducateur. N° 4. pp.58-59.15 novembre 1945.
42. My book on Freinet will be published by Greenwood Press by May 2000.
43. Freinet, Célestin. Pour L'Ère Nouvelle. Discours au Congrès de Cheltenham sur 'L'Imprimerie à l'École'. N° 121. pp. 246-253. Octobre 1936.
44. Freinet, Célestin. "Les Boys-Scouts". Monde. N° 74. p 13. 2 novembre 1929.
45. Under a special edict, Pope Pius XI authorized priests to become scout-leaders in order to teach scouting in a "catholic manner."
46.Avanzini, Guy. "Célestin Freinet (1896-1966)". Société Binet-Simon. Bulletin N° 493. Décembre 1966.
47. Boumard, Patrick (Université de Haute Bretagne, Rennes) wrote: Célestin Freinet. PUF. Paris. 1996.
48. Translated by V. Acker.
49. Freinet, Célestin. L'Éducateur prolétarien. Juillet 1939.

50. Villermoz, Eugène. "A l'école de Gutenberg"(Freinet). Le Temps. p. 1. Paris. 4 juillet 1926.

51. Famous battle where 75 French soldiers were executed for refusing to obey General Robert Nivelle's orders to fight a much superior German army. One of his comrades-in-arms was Jacques Doriot who, in later years, will bolt from the French Communist Party to create the Parti Populaire Français in 1936.

52. Freinet, Célestin. Touché. Souvenirs d'un blessé de guerre. Maison Française d'Art et d'Édition. 72 pages.1920. {Re-printed in 1996}.

53. Hughenin, Elizabeth. Paul Geheeb et la Libre Communauté de l' Odenwald. Edition du Bureau International des Écoles Nouvelles. Genève (Suisse). 1923.

54. "Free text", or "texte libre" refers to a compilation of the various texts written by the students; it is in apposition to "text books" or "manuels scolaires."

55. Freinet, Célestin. "Le scandale scolaire de Saint-Paul". Notre Arme. N° 106. pp. 2-17. Décembre 1932.

56. Freinet, Célestin. "Une année d'expérience à l'École Freinet". L'Éducateur Prolétarien. N° 19-20. pp.1-32.10 juillet 1936.

57. Ferrière, Ad. Lettre circulaire demandant la libération de Freinet. Avril 1940.

58. Available in French with English subtitles as "Passion for Life."

59. Freinet, Élise. "Scénario pour le film L'École Buissonnière". Bibliothèque de Travail. N° 100. Cannes. 22 janvier 1950.

60. PCF = Parti Communiste Français = French Communist Party.

61. Freinet est mort. Il est des morts qui vivent . . . intensément !